

VACHER'S MANIA TO SLAY.

EXTRAORDINARY CAREER OF THE FRENCH MURDERER.

Twenty-three Assassinations Already Brought Home to Him—His Record Without a Parallel—A Band of Strangers in Paris and Its Female Chief—Kensington Museum Scandal—Mrs. Ormiston Chant in a Mute Mail.

LONDON, Oct. 29.—There is nothing in modern history with which to compare the sanguinary career of the French murderer, Vacher, the story of whose crimes I have told in a fragmentary way by cable as it has come out from day to day during the past fortnight. Jack the Ripper murders in London ten years ago are completely eclipsed by it, and the revelation is still incomplete. Twenty-three assassinations have already been brought home to this bloodthirsty wretch, and scarcely a day passes that another is not added to the list. It is doubtful if the murderer himself knows the number of his victims. He never publicly tells the story of some fresh tragedy to the examining Magistrate from time to time as the details recur to his diseased mind. Investigation in each case so far has produced full corroboration of the murderer's narrative. These cases include several crimes not heretofore discovered, but the victim's body has in each case been found where indicated—in a disused well or lonely thicket.

The story of this man, who killed merely for the sake of killing, should be made known throughout Christendom, for it constitutes the most startling warning of modern times against the criminal folly of turning loose upon society an individual subject to fits of homicidal mania. Vacher, who is only about 25 years old, was a peasant living near Lyons. He served his military term in a regiment of zouaves, and proved so good a soldier that he was made a non-commissioned officer. It was complained of him that he was brutally beating recruits under him. A young man, a member of a renowned French family, tells how Vacher once abused him so savagely while drilling him that he lost his temper and sprang at the young recruit. Luckily for the soldier, his companions seized him before he had succeeded in striking his victim. Vacher, however, was sentenced to death for assaulting an officer, might have been his fate under the stern laws of military discipline in France.

But there was no suspicion or ground for suspicion of Vacher's sanity at that time. Just after completing his service, Vacher was ill in hospital for several weeks. During his confinement he attempted to blow his brains out with a revolver, and he still carries the bullet somewhere inside his skull. The shot produced no effect on his insanity, so violent a character was he confined for a time at the lunatic asylum at Dôle. Dr. Gilbert, the well-known expert in mental diseases, says that the physician at the asylum released Vacher although he knew he was not fit to be at large, because they were afraid of an outcry in the press against the arbitrary confinement of a citizen under the pretext that he was insane.

That was three years ago. Since that time Vacher has wandered through the country districts of France, leaving everywhere a trail of blood, but understood by his countrymen as a mere wanderer. He was caught almost everywhere near Lyons about three weeks ago. Most of his victims were shepherd boys and girls, whom he found tending their flocks in lonely fields or on hillsides, but sometimes he killed men and women. In each case, he seemed seized with a frenzy after the fashion of a madman, and cut and slashed and often dismembered the body. He told the Magistrate one day that he considered himself a scourge sent by providence to afflict humanity. But his motive was often more rational and sordid. One man he killed because his victim wore a clean-looking shirt which Vacher coveted. Sometimes he admitted, he killed because he needed money and food.

The murderer was always remarkably clever in shifting suspicion from himself. Two years ago he killed a shepherd boy on a country road a few miles from Lyons. He hacked the body almost into pieces and then strolled on. Within a few minutes he was stopped by a gendarme, covered and there was immediate search for the murderer in all directions. A gendarme mounted on a bicycle soon overtook Vacher, and called upon him to produce his papers. He readily handed over his discharge from the zouaves as a non-commissioned officer.

"Why, that is all right," exclaimed the gendarme. "I am hunting a man who has just cut a boy's throat. Have you seen any suspicious character as you came along?"

"Oh, yes," responded the murderer without the least sign of discomposure. "I saw a man running across the fields to the north about a mile back." And the gendarme hurried off after the imaginary culprit.

Occasionally by some lucky chance a victim escaped him. A boy of 13 named Rodier was herding cows near Clermont Ferrand one day in October, a year ago, when he saw an ugly-looking, grinning fellow approach. He was a tramp, poorly dressed, and carrying a bag on his back. He covered and there was immediate search for the murderer in all directions. A gendarme mounted on a bicycle soon overtook Vacher, and called upon him to produce his papers. He readily handed over his discharge from the zouaves as a non-commissioned officer.

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under ordinary observation, and therein, of course, lies the danger to society from creatures with such propensities. The most disgusting feature of the whole frightful record is the fact that a criminal, sane or insane, should be able to go about for three years in a civilized, well-populated country, taking life at will and in an almost wholesale way, and yet be comparatively free from the pursuit of the agents of the law. It is the fashion in Europe, especially among the uneducated, to regard America as a more or less lawless wilderness, where human life is cheap. In the face of this revelation in a country which prides itself on the skill of its detectives, America should be safe, for a time at least, from the repetition of these slanders.

Paris itself is expressing relief from the infliction of a criminal scourge only less violent than the work of Vacher, *le centreur* (the dismemberer), in the southern districts. The police have at last captured a band of strangers, nearly twenty in number, who have operated in the outskirts of the capital for many months past. Several murders and many robberies are charged against them. In the lodgings of one member of the band nearly fifty stolen watches and twenty pairs of boots were found. Their plan was to live in wait for single pedestrians in lonely streets, garrote them, rob them of everything of value, including even boots and clothes, and then throw their bodies into the Seine.

Discomfited the police were mentioned gathering in the members of this murderous band; but the capture of which they are proud is that of the leader, who was put under lock and key on Thursday. This leader is a woman, a very Amazon among women, who thoroughly understands the technique by which she has long been known. "The Terror of the Fortifications." The male members of the gang, from time to time when captured, were induced to furnish more or less information about their male accomplices, but they were one and all mute as fish when questioned by the *Juge d'instruction* about their crimes. Most of them turned pale and trembled when the name was mentioned.

She was described as a creature of phenomenal strength and stature, without fear, and a fiend incarnate when roused.

Despairing of all other means of detection, the police established a close surveillance several weeks ago upon a man who was reported to have intimate relations with Marie Reu, the real name of the woman stranger.

On Thursday, after his discovery, and half a dozen policemen suddenly pounced upon her in the Avenue des Ternes. She was almost a match for them, even against such odds, and several of them bear the marks of a knife which she managed to use freely before she was overpowered. She is only 25, and she would be handsome if her face were not disfigured by scars, the marks of several desperate encounters. Several murders are laid to her individual charge, and the police expect to be able to send her to the guillotine soon after the next Assizes.

Long ago the pot called the kettle black. More recently two distinguished knights, Sir Charles Robinson and Sir John Donnelly, have been exchanging compliments. It came about in this way: The administration of the South Kensington Museum became some time ago a public scandal. The result was that a select committee was appointed to inquire into the matter. This committee issued a portion of its report a couple of days ago, and in it appear some strange tales. Of these, the little quarrel of Sir Charles Robinson and Sir John Donnelly are the most interesting and edifying.

Sir Charles is her Majesty's surveyor of pictures, belongs to the Academies of Fine Arts in Rome, Florence, Bologna, Antwerp, Madrid,

and Lisbon, and for seventeen years was superintendent of the art collections of South Kensington Museum. And yet Sir John, quoting from a report of the late Mr. Middleton, tells the select committee that "many articles have been bought for the museum by Sir Charles Robinson which were either stolen or were, like Caesar and Pompey, 'they are very much alike,' specially Pompey." But how about the South Kensington Museum? He had better revise his catalogue. In fact, that document wants a little revision for other reasons. In it the "Marian Annals" (*Mariani Fasti*) are described as being "by Marius Fasti." In another place the author of a book is given as "Deel," which is merely the Flemish for "volume," and Antonio Ferrar of Galata is catalogued as "Galatia (Antiochia)."

At the time of the publication of the "Sayings of Christ," which were found at Oxyrhynchus, on the banks of the Nile, by Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt, I was able to send some details of how the discovery was made and of the place in which they were found. The official report has been issued this week, and contains some interesting items in addition to those which I heard from the young explorers themselves.

The first three weeks of their search were devoted to the ancient Egyptian cemetery which Prof. Flinders Petrie discovered to the west of the temple of the goddess Hathor. He pointed out about the most curious discovery made consisted of the mummies of a woman and two children, who had had the hearts replaced by little mud charms wrapped up in bits of papyrus containing second-century counts too much decayed to be worth anything. But it was the explorers started to search the town itself, and in the first week Mr. Hunt found the Logia and St. Matthew fragment. After this, the little book in which they were published has not met with a corresponding success. I believe that up to the present not more than 300 copies have been sold.

Second only to the Logia in interest is a fragment of the fourth book of Thucydides. Of this you have already heard something by cable. It is of the deepest interest to classical students, as it affords the only preserved text of a portion of the Greek war, and the fragment is a valuable addition to the fragmentary remains of the Greek war. It consists of five chapters which comprise the passage describing the final battle of the Peloponnesian War, the battle of Aegospotami, and the capture of the city of Athens. It is a fragment of the most important kind, and its discovery is a valuable addition to the fragmentary remains of the Greek war. It consists of five chapters which comprise the passage describing the final battle of the Peloponnesian War, the battle of Aegospotami, and the capture of the city of Athens. It is a fragment of the most important kind, and its discovery is a valuable addition to the fragmentary remains of the Greek war.

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